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Contact:

Robert T. Anderson

For Release:

Immediately

Phone:

901-544-3360

Corps appeals to Missouri Clean Water Commission for St. John's Bayou – New Madrid Floodway Project water quality certification

MEMPHIS, Tenn. – December 10, 2002 – The Memphis District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers filed an appeal today with the Missouri Clean Water Commission in response to the denial by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources of a Section 401 Water Quality Certification for the St. John's Bayou - New Madrid Floodway Project.

The appeal challenges the denial on the grounds that the project fully complies with Missouri water quality standards, and all other water quality standards required by Federal law. The appeal also allows the Corps to make its case for water quality certification with a hearing before the Missouri Clean Water Commission.

The St. John's Bayou-New Madrid Floodway Project (SJNM) represents an intense effort by the Corps to address environmental concerns, while also reducing personal and economic suffering caused by frequent agricultural and urban flooding. Working closely with the local, state and Federal agencies, the Corps added innovative measures to address concerns regarding environmental impacts.

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For example, the proposed project allows for a connection between the Mississippi River and the New Madrid Floodway during the critical spring fish reproductive period. Opening flood control gates until mid-May will make the connection possible. The gate management approach will also allow for the inundation of up to 2,000 more acres of forested wetlands and low elevation croplands in the lower Floodway than previous designs, thereby reducing impacts to wetlands and fish.

Moreover, the project mitigation plan will reforest 8,375 acres -- more than doubling the amount of bottomland hardwoods in the project area. These reforested lands will also increase wildlife habitat and provide important wetland functions for the region's overall ecology. Purchasing a portion of the mitigation lands adjacent to Big Oak Tree State Park to expand and enhance water management capabilities in the park is a Corps priority.

Another feature of the Corps plan is construction of measures to provide water to the Park to mimic historic flooding and thus preserve its existing bottomland hardwoods while aiding in the reproduction of native tree species. In addition to these and other measures designed to compensate for project impacts, the Corps has proposed several measures to enhance the habitat of the project area. The most significant of these is establishment of buffers and vegetated corridors along floodway streams and channels to improve water quality and fish habitat, as well as improve wildlife habitat where once vast woodlands have been converted to agricultural uses.

In keeping with the Corps' environmental operating principles, the St. John's – New Madrid Floodway Project seeks balance and synergy among human development activities and natural systems by offering an environmentally sustainable solution that supports and reinforces the needs of both.

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